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PROG

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SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE, EUR/PPD, SRAP, SCA/A

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PROPOSAL TO SEND TURKISH JOURNALISTS TO AFGHANISTAN

11. (U) This is an action request. Please see para. 9.

Turkey: A Key Contributor in Afghanistan...

12. (SBU) Turkey is an important contributor to NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and is a key partner in the USG's broader efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Turkey has over 1700 troops deployed to Afghanistan, is currently leading Regional-Command Capital (RC-Capital), has fielded a civilian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Wardak since 2006, is planning to stand up a second PRT in Jawzjan Province, recently announced an ambitious program to train a brigade's worth of Afghan national security forces (ANSF) personnel in Turkey, has pledged 200 million dollars for reconstruction in Afghanistan, and will host a trilateral summit among Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan on January 25 and a Afghanistan Regional Summit on January 26.

...But Public Support Remains Weak

13. (SBU) The extent of Turkey's involvement in Afghanistan, unfortunately, is little known and poorly understood by the public in Turkey. More Turks are opposed to NATO's mission in Afghanistan than are supportive, and most do not support Turkish contributions to ISAF and would prefer that Turkey withdraws its troops from Afghanistan. If current trends persist, weak public support for ISAF could eventually translate to an erosion of political support for increasing or even maintaining Turkey's contributions to NATO's essential mission, especially in advance of national elections scheduled for mid-2011. While Post regularly nominates a Turkish participant to the periodic multi-country USNATO Afghanistan Tour for journalists, these tours do not have a Turkey focus and have not resulted in a significant amount of media coverage for Turkey's contributions towards Afghanistan.

The Proposal

14. (SBU) Post believes that Turkey's command of RC-Capital and its plans to establish a second PRT in Jawzjan provides an optimal window to send a group of 10 Turkish journalists to Afghanistan for a week. Through this program, we hope to:

- underscore our shared interests in Afghanistan and joint efforts with Turkey there, including on reconstruction and

development;

- b. better explain NATO's ISAF mission and what NATO is doing to protect civilian populations;
- c. articulate U.S. goals following President Obama's December 2 speech, including our efforts to defeat al Qaeda;
- d. highlight the nature of the security challenge (the type of operations conducted by opposing military forces against both civilian and military targets); and
- e. note the effects of operational caveats on the ability of commanders to utilize NATO forces in Afghanistan.

¶15. (SBU) Our goal is to generate more positive Turkish press coverage for NATO's ISAF operations in general and Turkey's contributions in ISAF in particular. Highlighting Turkey as a key player in NATO's most critical operation will also likely generate a better appreciation for NATO itself and greater public support for Turkey's active participation in NATO. We envision sending a group of ten journalists and opinion makers to Afghanistan in 2010. Their visit to Afghanistan should include two days in Kabul, where the group will receive briefings from officials at U.S. Embassy Kabul, NATO ISAF Headquarters, the Turkish Embassy in Kabul, and the Turkish commander of RC-Capital. The group would then travel to Wardak where it will have an opportunity to observe the Turkish PRT in Wardak in action and visit projects established by the PRT.

GoT Buy-In and Post Support

¶16. (SBU) Post has floated the proposal to both the Turkish MFA and the Turkish General Staff. The TGS has expressed general support for the concept while the MFA offered to support the program. During a conversation with PolMilCouns on January 8 in Ankara, Turkish Ambassador to Kabul Basat Ozturk pledged his support for the program and offered to arrange a briefing for the group with the Turkish commander of RC-Capital and to arrange a visit to the Turkish PRT in Wardak. Ozturk said that this program would be in line with his own efforts to generate greater understanding and appreciation in Turkey of Turkey's contributions in Afghanistan. Post PAS has allocated 25,000 USD in support of this program, and post is prepared to send a pol-mil officer to escort the group.

Missing Pieces

¶17. (SBU) Two essential pieces are needed for this program to be realized. First, we will need to transport the group to and from Afghanistan. While commercial options are available, they are costly (over 5,000 USD per person), would exceed Post's available funding for the program, and are inconvenient. Another option is to take advantage of the existing agreement for Turkey to send cargo on a weekly basis from Incirlik Air Base to Bagram Air Base. We understand, however, that an exception to policy will be needed in order to use available space on these flights to transport passengers. We would welcome Department guidance on whether such an exception can be secured and, if not, whether there are other cost-effective options to get the group of journalists to and from Afghanistan.

¶18. (SBU) The other key piece is logistic, program, and security support for the group while they are in Afghanistan (including stops in Kabul and Wardak). We would greatly welcome and appreciate support similar to that provided to participants of USNATO's Afghanistan tour for journalists.

Action Request

¶19. (SBU) Post requests Department's approval of the program proposed above. If the program is approved, we request Department's assistance in facilitating transportation arrangements to and from Afghanistan and Embassy Kabul's assistance in arranging logistic and security support for the program while the group is in Afghanistan. Post stands ready

to answer any additional questions about the proposed program. Post POCs for the program are Embassy Spokesperson Deborah Guido (e-mail: guidodl@state.gov; phone: 90-312-457-7312) and Pol-Mil Officer Robert Lee (e-mail: leerd@state.gov; phone: 90-312-457-7177).

Jeffrey

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